



Countryside Initiative



Growing a Different Kind of Green in the Valley

Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) has introduced an innovative, new program to preserve the rural landscape of the Cuyahoga Valley. This program, the Countryside Initiative, invites farmers to live and farm in the park using sustainable methods appropriate for a national park. Making the program work involves a three-part partnership among the National Park Service, the Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy (CVCC), and farmers.

A Lived-In Landscape

Cuyahoga Valley's landscapes have evolved through the interplay of people and nature. People arrived here as early as 13,000 years ago, living as hunters and gatherers. Successive generations found new ways to make their living from the resources of the valley, many relying on agriculture. American Indians began to

experiment with growing plants as early as 4,000 years ago. By the 19th century this was a bustling agricultural valley. Today the valley's rural farm fields and associated buildings are among the most historic and scenic resources in the park.

The Challenge of the Rural Landscape

In 1974 Congress created CVNP to preserve and protect "the historic, scenic, natural, and recreational" resources of the Cuyahoga Valley. Preserving the valley's rural scenery and cultural history has been one of the biggest challenges of this mandate. In many of its endeavors, the National Park Service must balance the sometimes conflicting preservation needs of the natural environment and cultural resources. Managing park landscapes that evolved through the interplay of people and nature elevates this challenge. More importantly it provides an opportunity to model land-use practices that promote a healthy relationship between people and the earth.



The Countryside Initiative

The Countryside Initiative tackles the challenges of managing the rural landscape by recruiting expertise in sustainable agriculture to assist the National Park Service. In 1999 the park helped form a non-profit partner, the Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy (CVCC), to facilitate the program. With its knowledge in sustainable farming, the CVCC provides guidance to park staff and the farmers in the program.



The farmers are the third, key element in the Countryside Initiative. The NPS grants long-term leases of farmsteads and associated fields to private citizens who demonstrate the ability to practice sustainable farming. The NPS and CVCC select the farmers through a competitive process.

Three pilot farms have started operations in the park. Over time the Countryside Initiative will grow to 25 - 30 farms that will use approximately 1350 acres, or about 5%, of parklands. The farms pursue small, diversified crop and livestock operations that target local specialty and niche markets. With their location in a national park, the farms are also expected to offer recreational and educational opportunities for park visitors.

Farming in a National Park

The Countryside Initiative is not trying to recreate the past. Rather it promotes living, working farms that represent the rural heritage of the Cuyahoga Valley. The initiative is designed to be sensitive to the protection of cultural and natural resources. Many farm buildings are rehabilitated historic structures. Modifications to the buildings and associated

grounds require careful review to maintain the cultural integrity of the property. Natural buffers between farm fields and neighboring streams and wetlands protect water resources. Farmers pursue sustainable practices that include diversified crop selection, crop rotation, and minimal use of pesticides.

Pilot Farms

Three Countryside Initiative pilot farms were established in 2002 and are in various stages of initial development and operation.

Spring Hill Farm & Market

Located on Riverview Road north of NPS Park Headquarters, the Spring Hill Farm & Market focuses on diversified vegetable and cut flower crops, as well as a small-scale poultry operation.

Blue Hen Family Farm

Also located on Riverview Road north of NPS Park Headquarters, the Blue Hen Family Farm emphasizes diversified vegetable crops for sale at local farmers' markets, as well as small-scale poultry and sheep operations.

Sarah's Vineyard

Located on Steels Corners Road, Sarah's Vineyard is a vineyard and winery. It will also grow berries and produce related products, such as jams and jellies. An art gallery and studio will also be established.



Chickens at the Blue Hen Family Farm. Photo by Lyndy Wertman.



Sarah's Vineyard. Photo by Lyndy Wertman.

Countryside Farmers' Market

The public can find high quality food and crafts produced at Countryside Initiative and other farms in and around the Cuyahoga Valley at the Countryside Farmers' Market. The market is located at Heritage Farms, a privately

owned family farm in Peninsula (6050 Riverview Road, south of State Route 303). The market is open every Saturday 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. from mid-June through mid-October.

CVNP encompasses 33,000 acres along the Cuyahoga River between Cleveland and Akron. Managed by the National Park Service, CVNP combines cultural, historical, recreational, and natural activities in one setting.

CVCC is a non-profit park partner organization that was established to help develop and facilitate a rural landscape management program at CVNP. For more information about CVCC or the Countryside Initiative, contact Darwin Kelsey at (330) 657-2532.



Cuyahoga Valley National Park

15610 Vaughn Road
Brecksville, Ohio 44141

www.nps.gov/cuva/
www.dayinthevalley.com/

(216) 524-1497
(800) 445-9667



Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy

2179 Everett Road
Peninsula, Ohio 44264

www.cvcountryside.org/

(330) 657-2532